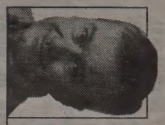
THE GAZETTE | SINCE 1872

"GT 1/13/12

GOP: Walk your talk with bill on civil unions



OPINION
BARRY NOREEN
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Colorado Republicans, who regard themselves as the champions of limited government, have again been presented with an opportunity to display their unique blend of intellect and morality.

Senate Bill 2, introduced by Denver Democrat Sen. Pat Steadman, would establish civil unions, giving same-sex couples the same rights heterosexuals have taken for granted forever. Backers of civil unions merely want gay couples to get simple things such as health benefits for their partners. Jackson thinks it is inevitable civil unions will be the law of the land one day.

But is there one Republican brave enough to be a dissenting vote on a committee?

"I think the time has come," Jackson said. "I think there is that Republican out there."

We'll soon see. In the meantime, keep up with the issue by checking out One Colorado (facebook.com/onecolorado), the group pushing the issue. It's not going away.

One Colorado's executive director, Brad Clark, said, "Whether it's this year or next year, it's not a matter of 'if' but 'when.'"

Listen to Barry Noreen on KRDO NewsRadio 105.5 FM and 1240 AM at 6:35 a.m. on Fridays. Look for blog updates at gazette.com/blogs/barrysblog and his videos at gazette.com/barry

STATE LEGISLATURE

GT 2/14/12

CIVIL-UNION BILL PROGRESSES AFTER MANY OPINIONS VOICED

Lawmakers hear arguments about equality, traditional values

BY JOHN SCHROYER
john.schroyer@gazette.com

DENVER • Sen. Pat Steadman introduced a bill last year to create civil unions for gay couples. It failed. So this year he's doing it again. And on Wednesday, it cleared its first hurdle in the state Senate.

But not without a fight.

More than a hundred supporters and opponents of the bill crammed the Old Supreme Court chambers for five hours Wednesday afternoon, giving legislators more than was probably necessary on why they should or shouldn't approve the bill.

Those who backed the measure contended universally that it was a question of equality and civil rights, while those against the measure said it was gay marriage in disguise.

Colorado Springs resident Lisa Green, a psychotherapist who specializes in family treatments, testified on behalf of the bill, and said it's something that

SEE CIVIL • PAGE 4

FOLLOW IT LIVE
Keep up with the news as it happens. Follow on Twitter @John Schroyer

CIVIL: Bill isn't expected to pass House

FROM PAGE 1

Colorado Springs needs to help gays live their lives.

mine traditional values and the institution of marriage.

"Rather than a smooth arc toward justice, I would

"We as a society are causing our own demise," said Cecilia O'Connor, a homemaker from Littleton.

COURTS

CHARITIES

EL POMAR'S GIFT

THE GAZETTE | SINCE 1872

"GT" 1/13/12

OPINION

BARRY NOREEN

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GOP: Walk your talk with bill on civil unions

Colorado Republicans, who regard themselves as the champions of limited government, have again been presented with an opportunity to display their unique blend of intellect and morality.

Senate Bill 2, introduced by Denver Democrat Sen. Pat Steadman, would establish civil unions, giving same-sex couples the same rights heterosexuals have taken for granted forever. Backers of civil unions merely want gay couples to get simple things such as health benefits for their spouses, the ability to make life-and-death decisions for their partners, the right to declare a partner a dependent on a tax form, community property — that sort of thing.

It's about basic freedoms, another thing Republicans claim to have an exclusive franchise in understanding. (OK, can't keep a "straight" face writing that one.)

If you can't live with whom you want without the government establishing a tax code and a jillion other laws to discourage you from living with that person, how free are you?

Why pick on Republicans?

Because they're the ones who have blocked civil unions legislation in the past, and they may well do it again this year. Last year, civil unions legislation died in a House committee on a "straight" party line vote.

Republicans are the ones who preach limited government but think it's fine to invite Big Brother into bedrooms and to build a matrix of laws that punish some citizens for being different.

Jennifer Jackson and her husband, who live in northern El Paso County, have two sons. Their 16-year-old, Brandon, started the Gay Straight Alliance at Lewis-Palmer High School.

At a kick-off event for SB2 on Wednesday night in Colorado Springs, Jackson told a crowd, "one of my sons is guaranteed certain legal rights and the other one isn't. I don't think the government should be able to tell my sons who they can live with."

Jennifer Jackson says that ater on, when her gay son chooses a partner, "he knows that will be a struggle for him, and I don't want it to be a struggle for him."

Polls show Americans are becoming more accepting of the civil unions concept. Jackson thinks it is inevitable civil unions will be the law of the land one day.

But is there one Republican brave enough to be a dissenting vote on a committee?

"I think the time has come," Jackson said. "I think there is that Republican out there."

We'll soon see. In the meantime, keep up with the issue by checking out One Colorado (facebook.com/onecolorado), the group pushing the issue. It's not going away.

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"GT" March 5, 2012

GT 3/5/12

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

A DECISION TO FORGE A NEW PATH

Church will leave main governing body in U.S.

BY MARIA ST. LOUIS-SANCHEZ
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In a historic move for First Presbyterian Church in downtown Colorado Springs, almost 90 percent of its membership voted Sunday to leave the church's main governing body in the United States.

"What is broken down is a common vision and a common purpose," Senior Pastor Jim Singleton told a standing-room-only crowd at the church Sunday afternoon as he advocated for the split from the Presbyterian Church USA. "When we look at the national organization, it no longer connects here."

Sunday's vote was the culmination of 10 months of work by church leaders to distance themselves from the mainstream governing body of the Presbyterian church in the United States, which voted in May 2011 to allow openly gay ministers to be ordained. Singleton cited several other scriptural reasons for the split and said that the move has been "coming for a long time."

The church, 219 E. Bijou St., was founded in 1872 and, with 4,000 members, is one of the largest Presbyterian congregations in the United States.

At Sunday's informal vote, 88 percent of the members present voted to split with the Presbyterian Church USA and align with a newly formed governing body, the Evangelical Covenant Order, or ECO. That governing body is so new that it doesn't even have members yet, because all of its expected members are still splitting off, Singleton said. He is on a leadership council that helped create ECO.

To help make the split amicable, the church's regional body — the Pueblo Presbytery — developed guidelines for what it calls a "gracious dismissal policy" for congregations that want to leave. As part of

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GT 3/18/12

OPINION

BARRY NOREEN
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Yearbook flap a sign that times are changin'

Come mothers and fathers throughout the land.
And don't criticize what you can't understand.
Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command.
Your old road is rapidly agin'.
Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand.
For the times they are a-changin'.
– Bob Dylan

There is an investigation going in Colorado Springs School District 11 because some students claim a teacher made homophobic remarks about a proposed yearbook photo of two gay students holding hands.

"There's been a claim by one of the students that a derogatory remark was made," D-11 spokeswoman Devra Ashby said.

The Gazette has talked to students as well as the teacher, Angela Selman, and it would be an understatement to say there is a wide disparity between their versions of events. The investigation may not yield a clear result, so the last thing anyone should be doing is to form a lynching party aimed at the teacher.

We can't assume any party is lying, but we know every person on the planet has told a lie.

It's important there is an investigation, because not that long ago there probably wouldn't have been.

Palmer's record on recognizing gay students is good as long as you don't go too far back. School officials would not recognize the students' Gay/Straight Alliance organization and did so only in 2005 after losing a case filed by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Ashby said a photo of two lesbian students holding hands in the hallway, already published in The Gazette, was not offensive, but that another photo on the now-controversial page showing two heterosexual students kissing did not pass muster.

That makes sense. What is allowed in the hallways (holding hands) should be allowed in the yearbook.

Anyhow, this isn't about the photos any more, it's about what was said, or not said, about them.

Ostracizing gay people or bullying them must stop.

On Friday, a jury in New Jersey convicted a former Rutgers University student of hate crimes because he used a webcam to take secret video of his gay roommate kissing another man. The convicted man, Dharum Ravi, posted the video online and three days later his roommate, Tyler Clementi, killed himself.

The school district, the state, the military and the nation at large are turning the corner in becoming more tolerant of the gay community.

If you don't turn the corner with us, we're going to leave you behind.

Or as Dylan said, "You'd better start swimming or sink like a stone."

Listen to Barry Noreen on KRDO NewsRadio 105.5 FM and 1240 AM at 6:35 a.m. on Fridays and follow him on Twitter and Facebook.

LOCAL

CHURCH: Critics worry about church being viewed as anti-gay

FROM PAGE 1

the policy, the Pueblo Presbytery, which owns the church's buildings, agrees not to take the buildings if the church agrees to pay a rate based on membership for five years. Over those years, the church estimates it would pay from $650,000 to $700,000.

To start the move, at least 80 percent of members at Sunday's meeting had to vote to leave. Since that guideline was met, the church will proceed with the split and soon take a formal vote, probably in late April, said Alison Murray, leader of the church's ministry staff.

The issue of openly gay ministers was not discussed much at Sunday's meeting. Church leaders instead focused on telling congregants how they came to the decision to split and why they felt it was necessary. In January, church leaders voted unanimously to make the split.

"Getting the gospel right matters because the church exists to get the gospel out," said Amber Odvody, an associate pastor.

Singleton did say that the amendment that allowed for openly gay clergy probably would not have affected First Presbyterian because it allows churches to decide for themselves whom to appoint as pastors. But the fact that it passed raised red flags about the division between the theology of First Presbyterian and its governing body, he said.

"It shows in a formal way that scripture is being interpreted so differently," Singleton said.

Sunday's vote was not without dissent. During a question-and-answer session, some congregants questioned the move. They wondered why it was necessary to "splinter" the church even more by going to an entirely new structure and worried that the church may be viewed as anti-gay.

Robin Dailey said he has attended nine meetings about the potential split, and all have been one-sided.

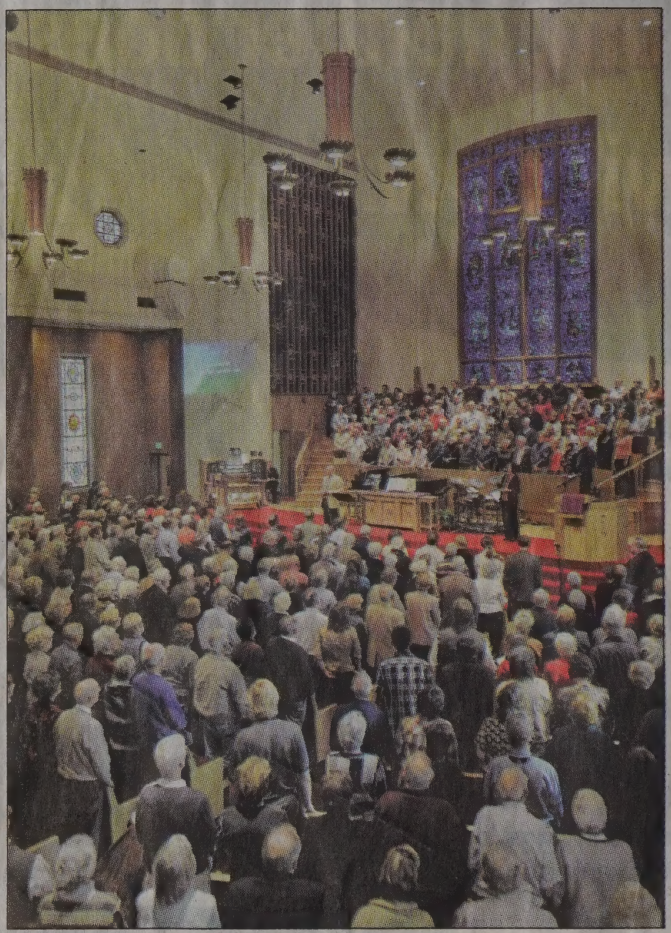
"The reasons not to move have not been given," he said.

He said many congregants have gay family members and friends whom they want to bring to church. He wondered if the decision to split would put them off.

"Will they try to come if First Presbyterian Church is considered an anti-gay church?" he questioned.

After the meeting, congregant Dick Dodge said he supported the split and wasn't worried about the possibility of the church's image suffering because of the rift. The issue has been blown out of proportion by the media, he said.

"They're creating a controversy where there isn't one," he said. "The image can be viewed as a big deal, but it shouldn't be. This move isn't about that."



Members of First Presbyterian Church sing together Sunday afternoon during a congregational meeting. At Sunday's informal vote, 88 percent of the members present voted to split with the Presbyterian Church USA and align with a newly formed governing body, the Evangelical Covenant Order, or ECO.

MARK REIS, THE GAZETTE

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4/20/12 GT

OPINION

BARRY NOREEN
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Focus need not worry about First Amendment

Colorado Springs-based Focus on the Family is on a collision course with the state's gay community over a proposed constitutional amendment that moved one step closer to the state ballot Wednesday.

Tom Minnery, executive director of Focus' political-action arm, CitizenLink, said the proposed religious freedom amendment is intended to stop government intrusions upon religious groups. The simply worded, one-sentence measure says "government may not burden a person's or religious organization's freedom of religion."

Minnery cited a state decision in 2003 not to include Colorado Christian University among schools eligible for grants because the school was judged to be "pervasively sectarian."

Minnery said the First Amendment is no longer sufficient to protect religious organizations and added that "16 states have passed religious rights restoration acts. The republic is not threatened. This is not breaking new ground."

Yet Colorado's gay community feels very threatened.

Brad Clark, executive director of One Colorado, said the Focus proposal is not about protecting religious organizations; "it's about something else."

One Colorado, joined by the American Civil Liberties Union and the Anti-Defamation League, worries that the government not burdening "a person's religious freedom or religion" would turn out to mean that landlords and employers could legally discriminate against gays, or even divorcees.

"We don't know what this is going to do," Clark said. "It would create a two-tiered society."

The Focus proposal, Initiative 78, is an inappropriate way of commemorating the 20th anniversary of Amendment 2 — approved by Coloradans in 1992 but struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court — which would have allowed legalized discrimination against gays.

Clark said although the state's ballot title setting board has given Focus the green light to begin collecting the 86,000 signatures needed, his coalition will appeal to the Colorado Supreme Court to keep the measure off the November ballot. If the measure appears on the ballot and voters approve as they did 20 years ago, Clark promised a similar legal struggle.

Amendment 2, after all, was never in force. After it was approved, a Denver district judge granted an injunction to keep it from becoming law. The Colorado Supreme Court found it unconstitutional, as did the nation's highest court.

Minnery said Focus is pushing the ballot measure because efforts to get the Legislature to pass a new law failed. It's worth noting that Colorado Christian University prevailed in court — the First Amendment protections worked.

Legislators try to do plenty of nutty things. We don't need to pass a new constitutional amendment every time they fall on their faces.

As much as court rulings may confound, the First Amendment doesn't need amending.

GT 4/23/12

PHOTOS BY MARK REIS, THE GAZETTE

First Presbyterian Church members pick up ballots before a congregational meeting at the church Sunday.

CHURCH MEMBERS DECIDE TO LEAVE DENOMINATION

More than 95 percent who voted cast ballots to join a more conservative group

BY MARIA ST. LOUIS-SANCHEZ
maria.sanchez@gazette.com

In a historic vote Sunday morning, the largest Presbyterian church in Colorado voted overwhelmingly to leave its governing body and join a new, more conservative denomination.

An estimated 95.5 percent of the 1,769 congregants who cast ballots at First Presbyterian Church in downtown Colorado Springs voted to leave the mainstream Presbyterian Church USA in favor of the newly created Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians.

The new denomination was created with the help of First Presbyterian's se-

SEE CHURCH • PAGE 6

Nancy Maffett, right, prays over ballots collected during a congregational meeting Sunday at First Presbyterian Church.

CHURCH: Leaders counted almost 2,000 people present for the vote

FROM PAGE 1

nior pastor Jim Singleton.

The final vote tally was 1,689 church members in favor of the split with 80 opposed, the church said during an evening service.

The shift to the new denomination might cause some members to leave, acknowledged Alison Murray, staff leader, after the results were announced.

"We grieve that and don't want that to happen," she said.

The church now has to try to identify those members who voted against the split and help them find new local churches within the Presbyterian Church USA if they want to leave, she said.

Church leaders counted almost 2,000 people present for the 9:45 a.m. vote, though not all were voting members.

"This is a powerful day for our church. It's a historic day," Dick Schultz, a church leader, told a crowd so large that it spilled out of the main sanctuary and filled other rooms in the building that had a video feed of the proceedings. "Days like this don't happen by happenstance."

First Presbyterian Church was founded in 1872, just one year after William Palmer founded Colorado Springs. The church has membership rolls of 3,900 and an average weekly attendance of 2,300, according to the Hartford Institute of Religious Research, making it the largest Presbyterian church in the state.

Sunday's vote was the culmination of almost a year's worth of work by church leaders who wanted to distance themselves from the Presbyterian Church USA. That organization voted in 2011 to allow openly gay ministers to be ordained, but First Presbyterian leaders say the divide is greater than just that issue — going back to a basic way that Scriptures are read and interpreted.

MARK REIS, THE GAZETTE

First Presbyterian Church members outside the church after a congregational meeting Sunday. The church voted to leave the denomination.

"God has called us to respond to his call, step into something new and hold firm to our understanding of Scripture," Cindy Sparks, chair of the church's Board of Trustees, said Sunday morning.

For the vote to be valid, 33 percent of the church's membership had to take part, and 80 percent of those votes had to favor the split. The vote easily met that threshold. But the split isn't quite official. That won't happen until the Pueblo Presbytery, the regional organization the church is in, votes to release the church at its June 16 meeting.

Singleton told church members that there's no reason to assume that the split wouldn't be approved — the two groups have been negotiating the split for months.

When it happens, First Presbyterian Church plans to pay the presbytery membership payments for five years, as much as $700,000. The presbytery would agree to relinquish its ownership of the church's buildings.

The church was in favor of the split well before Sunday. In January, the church's leadership team voted unanimously for the split. In early March, the general membership voted overwhelmingly for it in a straw poll.

Still, it was not without controversy in the church. At the Sunday morning vote, members were given a chance to discuss the vote they were about to make. Jane Leighty Justis told the congregation that she understood why the move was happening. With a master's degree in Christian leadership from Fuller Seminary, she also understood the scriptural reasons for wanting to leave.

"I also have a gay daughter, and I have been a recipient of the gracious things this church has done and the not-so-gracious," she said.

She said she worried that if the church did separate that it would not continue to work hard to be welcoming to everyone.

"My fear for the church is to say that problem has passed," she said.

Most of the church members who spoke during the discussion favored the split and said they felt they were staying firm to their beliefs.

"This church is deciding to stand on the rock," one member said. "PCUSA is moving away from the word of God."

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"GT" 4/26/12

LEGISLATURE

SENATE MOVES TO PASS CIVIL UNION BILL

Would give gay couples more rights

BY KRISTEN WYATT
The Associated Press

DENVER • A civil union proposal advanced in the Colorado Senate on Wednesday as lawmakers tentatively approved a measure that would give gay couples legal protections similar to marriage.

The bill appears headed toward a real test in the GOP-controlled House.

Senators approved the civil union bill on an unrecorded voice vote after several lawmakers shared personal experiences to argue in favor of adopting legal protections for all unmarried couples and their children.

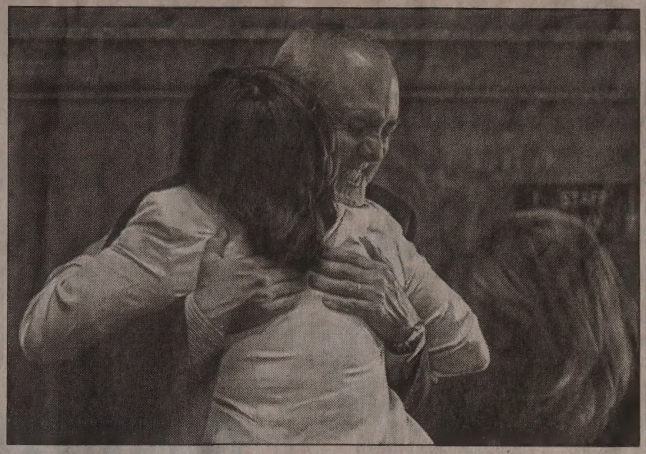
Colorado voters banned gay marriage through a constitutional amendment in 2006. The provisions in the civil union bill, however, could be enacted without a vote by the people.

Democratic Sen. Pat Steadman, as he has in the past, argued for his civil union proposal, speaking from his perspective as a gay man in a committed relationship. Steadman held up thick, heavy books of Colorado law to illustrate how many legal protections are available only to married couples.

Steadman argued that boring nuts-and-bolts aspects of Colorado probate law make life unduly complicated for unmarried couples.

"Why is this so important?" Steadman asked. "It's because life happens to people. People have babies. People adopt children. People have accidents. People end up in the

SEE SENATE • PAGE 6



David Misner, right, gets a hug from Colorado State Sen. Angela Giron, D-Pueblo, on Wednesday in Denver. Misner's partner is Sen. Pat Steadman, D-Denver.

ANDY CROSS, THE DENVER POST

SENATE: Civil union measure has simmered since January

FROM PAGE 3

hospital."

Republican Sen. Nancy Spence argued for the measure, as well. Spence also has previously supported the bill.

"The Republican Party, the party of Lincoln, must continue to champion civil liberties," Spence said.

Republican Sen. Scott Renfroe was one of the only voices questioning the measure. The Greeley Republican challenged Steadman's argument that civil unions are distinct from gay marriage.

"What's left that distinguishes marriage as marriage?" Renfroe asked.

The Senate rejected a proposed amendment from another Republican to give people "freedom of conscience" not to recognize same-sex unions.

"Are we not as human as you?" Steadman asked.

The civil union measure has simmered in the state Legislature since January. After one more vote in the Democratic Senate, the measure heads to the House, where it's unclear whether ruling Republicans will support the proposal in the final weeks of the 2012 session.

Last year, a similar bill failed by a single vote in a GOP House committee.

"Gazette" 4/27/12

As we raise higher walls

First Presbyterian has chosen a path. But there is another path. Covenant Presbyterian Church (2845 Parliament Dr.) has thus far chosen a less-traveled road. We are watching and praying while asking the Lord what he would have us do. At this time, Covenant remains in the discernment process.

Covenant's Statement on Human Sexuality calls our members to live lives that affirm God's intention for marriage to be between one man and one woman. Additionally, members are called to live lives that obey Biblical standards of fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness. Further, we are called to withhold ordination from those who are unrepentant in practicing homosexual behavior.

Yet at the same time, we desire to build bridges of hope and healing to a hurting world. A world that includes those whose sexuality beliefs are different than ours.

However, Christians lose bridge-building credibility as we raise higher walls. Christians are master craftsmen who have been building walls of protection around our "truth" for millennia. The wall named "ordination of homosexuals" is perhaps the newest.

Covenant does not appear anxious to raise walls. Nor do we seem ready to lower them presently. Instead, we are readily willing to apprentice ourselves to the master bridge builder. This we can start doing by remaining in fellowship with committed Christians whose faith does not mirror our own. Our ability to be 'salt and light' is hindered by lack of such fellowship.

There is persistent tension between our desire to safeguard truth and our desire to take a step on the bridge of faith. Our knowledge of truth is imperfect, but our faith is made perfect through Christ. Thus we should consider holding a tighter grip on our faith than our truth. Come build bridges with us.

William A. Turner, Covenant Presbyterian Church member
Colorado Springs

Christianity invented diversity

Apparently, the Gazette views First Presbyterian's departure from PCUSA as nothing more than an anti-gay pronouncement. In effect, the media has determined that Christianity is to be the "Church of Sexual Persuasion." That isn't what Christianity is about. You come to a Christian house of worship because you are a Christian seeking to worship God.

Diversity is now a concept plagiarized by the left, but it was Christianity that invented diversity: that all people are equal in the eyes of God, and thus to all Christian believers. Americans are tired of in your face, anti-Christian, anti-family, and anti-patriotic sentiments, under the cover of "causes." First Presbyterian congregants took a stand Sunday. Not against gays, as the press wants to portray the vote, but as Christians and Americans. I am proud to say that this past Sunday, Colorado Springs became the Shining City on the Hill.

Marleann Carter
Colorado Springs

His call to practice love

The April 23 Gazette carries two reports on local views concerning religion. First Presbyterian Church has voted to separate from its governing body and join a newly-created conservative evangelical body. The new church states that "God has called us to respond to his call ... and hold firm to our understanding of scriptures" prohibiting homosexuals from serving as ministers.

My understanding of scripture reminds me of how Lot offered his two virgin daughters to strange men "to do to them as you please." (Genesis 19:8). Lot was saved as righteous when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed not as commonly interpreted for homosexuality (Isaiah 1:9, 3:9, Ezekiel. 16:46-49) but for their disregard for the poor.

In the "Your View" editorial poll 78 percent of Colorado Springs locals support a "no begging zone" law here. St Francis begged, but not in Colorado Springs. Lazarus, a poor man, begged at the door of a rich man. Lazarus went to heaven (Luke. 17:19-31).

Jesus' life as a relatively poor, itinerate preacher brought us the good news that his yoke was easy and his burden light (Matthew 11:30) and that he did not "tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders," (Matthew 23:4) as the religious organizations did then. Jesus' life expressed his hostility to existing political and economic domination and emphasized mercy, forgiveness and tolerance for the oppressed, the poor and minorities. (Matthew 6:20, 25, Mark 7, Luke 4). We are to give up "an eye for an eye" (Matthew 5:38-48), exercised by the powerful political, religious, wealthy and militant ones, and practice good works even loving our enemies. Christians then spent no time voting on laws or polls.

God has created human beings, some who were born homosexual, and others who have suffered in poverty. His call is to practice the love that comes before any book, church, or law.

Bill Durland
Colorado Springs

GT 5/4/12

LEGISLATURE

CIVIL UNIONS BILL CLEARS BIG HURDLE: GOP-LED COMMITTEE

Newfound support means Colorado likely to give legal protections to gay couples

BY IVAN MORENO
The Associated Press

DENVER • Gay couples campaigning for civil unions [illegible] committee advanced a bill Thursday that it had previously opposed.

The [illegible] vide legal protections to gay couples similar to those provided to married couples.

Rep. Mark Ferrandino, the Democrats' leader in the House and a gay lawmaker who sponsored the bill, said before the vote that he and others just want equal rights. He noted law books behind the Republican chairman overseeing the House Judiciary Committee's hearing.

"All we're asking is for

SEE CIVIL UNIONS • PAGE 7

OPINION
The civil unions bill has made Republicans and Democrats in the Colorado Legislature cynical, writes Gazette columnist Barry Noreen. Which party is more cynical? You decide, Noreen says.
Page 3

CIVIL UNIONS: Opponents say bill undermines marriage

FROM PAGE 1

equal access to those books that are behind you, Mr. Chairman," Ferrandino said.

The measure approved Thursday evening faces two more committee votes, but sponsors are optimistic that they have enough support to get the bill to Gov. John Hickenlooper, who is firmly behind the plan. The measure has passed the Senate.

At one point, dozens in the audience stood up when the committee chairman asked for supporters to stand because the first phase of testimony was ending and they wouldn't be able to speak.

The 6-5 vote came after hours of emotional testimony from gay couples who said they're vulnerable because they don't have rights afforded to married people. One Republican joined Democrats in approving the bill.

The plan died in the same committee last year.

Opponents argue that civil unions undermine traditional marriage and that voters expressed their position on the issue when they banned same-sex marriage in 2006.

Byron Babione, with the Alliance Defense Fund, a conservative group that stands for religious freedom, echoed the concerns of some of the opponents when he said civil unions are "marriage without the name."

But supporters say the bill still does not allow marriage between gay couples.

Opponents also said gay couples already have some of the legal protections they're seeking under a state-designated beneficiary law.

But supporters said there are important rights same-sex couples lack. The civil unions legislation gives gay couples more authority in medical and end-of-life decisions and enhances parental rights, among other things.

"I ask you to vote tonight in favor of all of your constituents," said Jason Cobb, a Denver attorney who is raising a son with another man. "We're more than a political issue. We're your family, we're your neighbors, your sons, your daughters, your grandchildren. I ask you to vote for family tonight."

Before the hearing, scores of people in civil unions rallied from the state Capitol on the steps of the City and County building.

Fran Simon showed the crowd paperwork that she and her partner, Anna Simon, have amassed to prove the legitimacy of their relationship — wills, powers of attorney and a birth certificate for their 4-year-old son.

"But even with this large stack of papers, we have no way of knowing if in our time of need, will it be sufficient?" Fran Simon said. "Even if it's sufficient, will we have the right paper at the right time?"

OPINION

BARRY NOREEN

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Cynicism abounds in Denver on civil unions

It's too bad the civil unions issue was turned into a political football this year by both parties in the Colorado Legislature.

Republicans and Democrats behaved in cynical fashion. You, readers, can decide which party was the more cynical.

The House Judiciary Committee's hearing on the civil unions bill went into Thursday evening before it was approved on a 6-5 vote. But even with that OK and all the accompanying hope that this will be the year for change, the Republican leaders will simply reassign the bill to another committee — and the session ends in six days.

Some GOP House members have said they would vote for the bill and nearly all the Democrats would, so there's no doubt it would pass if given a chance on the House floor.

Rep. Amy Stephens, R-Monument and the House majority leader, and Rep. Mark Waller, R-Colorado Springs and the House assistant majority leader, acknowledged civil unions would be law if the entire House held a vote.

Stephens confirmed that because the civil unions bill would cost $2 million to implement, it would be sent to a fiscal committee for review.

"Two million is quite a big fiscal note," Stephens said, noting that the number looms even larger because the state's budget has been approved.

Thus the House leadership decided to kill a bill they knew would pass with some support from their own party. A powerful minority beats the majority again — cynical.

This isn't about slamming Stephens or Waller. They've consistently opposed civil unions bills and besides, Colorado Democrats played a cynical game of their own.

The civil unions' legislation is SB2 — only one other bill was introduced before civil unions at the beginning of the session. It went through Senate but the $2 million fiscal note was attached, so it went to the Senate Appropriations Committee and languished.

Then, after the state budget bill was approved, the Democrat-controlled Senate voted the bill over to the House (four working days), knowing that the $2 million now loomed large, and also that there is little time left in the session to complete work on it in the House.

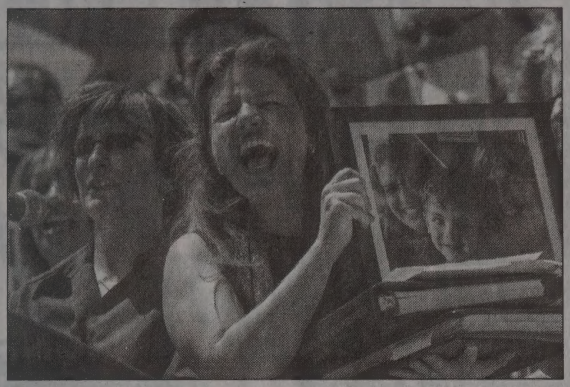
The gay community, which has made civil unions its top legislative priority, mobilized with rallies and social media communications. It helped to activate the Democrats' base — the civil unions story got big play in Denver on Thursday.

Readers, which party was more cynical? The one that used its power to stifle the majority, or the one whose half-hearted support now appears to have been mainly aimed at keeping loyalists active in an election year?

Tough call. A pox on both their houses.

Listen to Barry Noreen on KRDO NewsRadio 105.5 FM and 1240 AM at 6:35 a.m. on Fridays and follow him on Facebook and Twitter.

GT 5/5/12



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fran, left, and Anna Simon, holding a photograph of the couple and their son, Jeremy, address the crowd during a rally supporting civil unions Thursday in Denver.

CIVIL UNIONS BILL MOVES STEP CLOSER

Another GOP-controlled House panel OKs measure

BY IVAN MORENO
The Associated Press

DENVER • Gay couples came one step closer Friday to having civil unions in Colorado after another Republican-led House committee approved legislation that appears to have enough support to get to the governor's desk.

The finance committee approved the measure with a 7-6 vote after it passed the House judiciary committee late Thursday.

Rep. Don Beezley was the only Republican to support the measure on the finance panel.

"For me, it really came down to that basic issue of fairness and doing the right thing," Beezley said, echoing a similar comment made by Republican Rep. B.J. Nikkel, who joined Democrats on the judiciary committee in approving the measure.

The measure now goes before the appropriations committee. Democrats on that panel unanimously support the bill and need at least one Republican to vote yes for it to go to the House floor, where it will likely pass.

Republican Rep. Cheri Gerou, a member of the commit-

SEE BILL • PAGE 4

and parental rights, and the ability to be involved in partner's medical decisions.

Republicans who oppose the bill said it undermines traditional marriage and that voters expressed their position on the issue when they banned same-sex marriage in 2006.

Republicans have a 33-32 vote advantage in the House. But supporters say they have enough votes for passage.

Earlier Friday, Republican House Speaker Frank McNulty gave his colleagues a pointed warning from the podium, urging them not to attack the motives or legislators on pending legislation. He made clear later in an interview that he was referring to the civil unions bill.

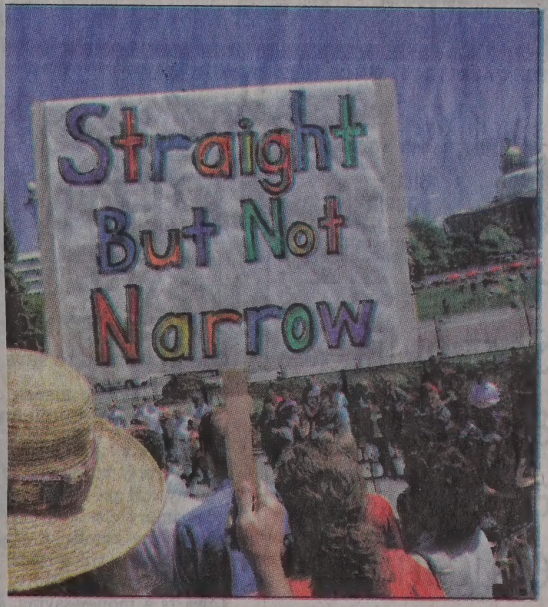
McNulty said Senate Democrats took months to move the bill to the House and did it on purpose to force a decision within the final days of the legislative session.

"I think that there are those in the Democratic Party that want to make sure that this issue is a political issue in November," he said, referring to the upcoming election.

He later said in an interview that the gay union bill will be scheduled under the rules, even though he noted that some supporters seek preferential treatment for certain bills.

Associated Press writer Kristen Wyatt contributed to this report.

tickenlooper soon



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

a sign during a rally backing civil unions Thursday in Den-
o support her lesbian daughter. She said, "It's absolutely
crazy that the GLBT population does not enjoy the same rights the rest of us enjoy."

GT 5/9/11

LEGISLATURE

REPUBLICAN FILIBUSTER KILLS LEGISLATION ON CIVIL UNIONS

House lawmakers spend hours on other measures

BY JOHN SCHROYER
John.schroyer@gazette.com

DENVER • A Republican filibuster brought the state House of Representatives to a halt Tuesday night, when legislators spent hours debating bills and then in recess, ensuring that a controversial bill to create civil unions for gay couples was never heard.

An impasse was declared around 11 p.m., and people in the gallery — filled mostly with supporters — started screaming and yelling. Moments later, the gallery was cleared. The 29 measures that were not heard by midnight died because all measures need two hearings at least 24 hours apart. The Legislature adjourns at midnight Wednesday.

Several other bills, including numerous water bills, marijuana DUI and school discipline, were caught in the standoff and not approved. Those bills, too, died. Check gazette.com for the latest on this story.

SEE CIVIL UNIONS • PAGE 2

INSIDE
The House Appropriations Committee approved the civil unions bill Tuesday, but it was barely recognizable after GOP amendments. The full House put it on the calendar, and the GOP began stalling. But despite what happened, Republicans will come out losers, Barry Noreen writes. A3

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OPINION

BARRY NOREEN
noreen@gazette.com / 636-0363

GOP won battle, but it won't win war

The civil unions bill has been a real cliffhanger with a new chapter in the melodrama every day.

The House Appropriations Committee approved the civil unions bill Tuesday, but it was barely recognizable after GOP amendments. The full House put it on the calendar, and Republicans began stalling to keep it from coming to a vote. The legislation died because of the stalling.

What occurred in recent days with this bill was not an example of democracy at its finest.

But here is a prediction: Despite what happened, Republicans will come out losers.

That's because a growing number of Coloradans don't see the GOP as the party that will rescue them from Big Brother — they see it as a party overly influenced by evangelical Christians who want to tell them how to live.

Consider: A few years ago the GOP had a substantial lead in registered voters over Democrats, and independent voters lagged farther behind.

Now the three groups are roughly the same in size as disenchanted voters have left the parties to join the ranks of the independents. A GOP partisan would point out that Democrats' ranks have been hurt, too.

Yet one thing Democrats and Republicans both love is winning. In recent campaigns the GOP got clobbered by former Gov. Bill Ritter, smeared by Gov. John Hickenlooper, soundly beaten by Sen. Mark Udall and couldn't hold off Sen. Michael Bennet when he ran for an open seat.

President Barack Obama won here.

Realistically, whom do you think Colorado's independent voters have been supporting?

Republicans hold a one-vote majority in the Colorado House; the Democrats do not appear to be in danger of losing their grip on the State Senate.

November's election calculus is difficult to figure, but based upon the way the pendulum has swung, the Democrats' chances of flipping one seat in the 65-seat House look decent. At that point, the fate of the civil unions bill and many others would be academic.

Rep. Amy Stephens, the Monument Republican who serves as the majority leader, is an ardent opponent of civil unions. She once worked for Focus on the Family, the Colorado Springs-based organization that typifies the Colorado GOP "we-will-tell-you-how-to-live" attitude.

It's an attitude that is losing support.

A civil unions measure lost at the polls in 2006 by a 53-47 percent margin, but public opinion polling shows the state's attitude has changed quite a bit, especially among younger people.

Killing the civil unions bill would make some in the GOP happy for a time, but it won't hold back the tide.

CIVIL UNIONS: Lawmakers blaming one another for manipulating rules

FROM PAGE 1

Democrats and Republicans furiously blamed each other for manipulating legislative rules to get their way.

When the House convened Tuesday afternoon, Democrats stalled the debate on bills until Speaker of the House Frank McNulty, R-Highlands Ranch, angrily stormed down to the floor of the House and confronted Minority Leader Mark Ferrandino, D-Denver.

"Do you want to do this all night? Do you want to hold up proceedings all night?" McNulty said to Ferrandino.

The pair, along with other legislative leaders, stepped into a side room to argue. Ferrandino told McNulty the Democrats didn't trust that he would allow the bill to be introduced on the floor, and McNulty finally promised he would. The House then got up and running.

More than 30 bills were scheduled to be heard, though, and civil unions was far down the list.

Democrats tried to rearrange the schedule just before 9 p.m., and Republicans immediately put the hearing into recess. It remained in recess at 10:30 p.m.

"We were not going to allow them to continue to filibuster," Ferrandino said. "This is in the speaker's hands now."

Rep. Mark Waller, R-Colorado Springs, blamed Ferrandino for "playing procedural games."

He blamed Senate Democrats for not sending the civil unions bill until nearly the end of the session and said they could have taken care of the bill much earlier.

"The Democrats are playing politics with this, plain and simple," Waller said. "They want us to be in this circumstance right now, so they can increase their chances of taking a majority in the House next year."

The bill was raised on the House floor Tuesday night after it was approved by a 7-6 majority in the House Appropriations Committee, with a lone Republican siding with Democrats to pass the measure.

It was the second time that happened — in the House Judiciary Committee last week, a separate Republican also voted in favor of the bill.

Ferrandino has said he had the votes to pass the measure, including the two Republicans who supported the bill in committee. But that support would be a moot point if Republican leadership kept the bill from being voted on.

Proponents of the measure held a large rally Tuesday morning on the west side of the Capitol, chanting, "Let them vote! Let them vote!"

A number of Democratic senators spoke at the rally and painted the civil unions bill as a measure of social equality.

Throughout Tuesday evening, social media networks were overflowing with comments about the stalling tactics and the lack of attention to getting legislative business done.

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"GT" 5/10/12

COLORADO LEGISLATURE

GOVERNOR CALLS FOR SPECIAL SESSION ON CIVIL UNIONS BILL

Hickenlooper: 'We are depriving people of their civil rights, without reason'

BY JOHN SCHROYER
john.schroyer@gazette.com

DENVER • Any state lawmaker planning on a vacation any time soon got some bad news on Wednesday — they're not done.

Gov. John Hickenlooper upended the Colorado political scene when he announced that he would call a special session of the Legislature to revisit the Democratic civil unions bill that died in the House on Tuesday night. The General Assembly adjourned Wednesday night, but by law, the governor can force it to reconvene and take up any issue he wants.

Gov. John Hickenlooper

And that's exactly what Hickenlooper is doing.

The bill Hickenlooper is interested in would create civil unions for gay couples and grant them many of the same rights as straight married couples. He announced the special session on the

SEE GOVERNOR • PAGE 2

MORE INSIDE

Among bills that cleared the Legislature were an overhaul of child-literacy procedures for public schools and bans on trans fats in school food and synthetic drugs sold as "bath salts." A2

A FIRST FOR GAY MARRIAGE

President Barack Obama announces his support for gay marriage. Advisers say his support, the first for a U.S. president, will have little impact on his 2012 campaign or on policy, and that he still believes marriage is an issue for states. A7

GOVERNOR: Springs Republicans say issue of civil unions is a done deal for this year

FROM PAGE 1

same day that President Barack Obama told ABC that he supports gay marriage.

"This is a circumstance where we are depriving people of their civil rights, without reason," Hickenlooper told reporters.

In his January state of the state speech, Hickenlooper called on lawmakers to pass civil unions. The issue is a personal one for him. His eyes teared up when he spoke of an old acquaintance from the restaurant business who pushed him on civil unions. Many gays in the restaurant business, he said, aren't granted the same rights as heterosexual people.

"I had a call yesterday from one of them, who just asked, 'If not now, when?'" Hickenlooper said.

Civil unions are significantly different from gay marriage, Hickenlooper added, saying that he would not presume to tell religious organizations who to marry.

The special session may start as soon as Friday, Hickenlooper said, but specifics were not immediately available. Hickenlooper said he was waiting until the Legislature adjourned, in case there were additional bills he might want to include in the special session's agenda.

Hickenlooper said he would likely include bills in the special session that have to do with public safety and the economy.

By law, special sessions must last at least three days, but there's no limit to how long they may go. The last special session, in 2006, dealt with immigration reform and lasted five days. A special session in 2002 lasted just three days, and one in 1991 lasted 60 days.

Special sessions cost the state $23,500 per day, but 15 days' worth of a session is included in the state budget. And next year's budget, which kicks in July 1, automatically included funding for 20 days. Hickenlooper said the session wouldn't cost the state anything more unless the session runs over its limit.

Legislative Republicans were irritated that Hickenlooper revealed his plans to the media before conferring with them.

"We haven't heard anything from the governor on a special session," said Rep. Mark Waller, R-Colorado Springs, the assistant House majority leader. "I'm not sure what his agenda is. I don't know or understand why a special session would be necessary."

Rep. Bob Gardner, R-Colorado Springs, said the session is unnecessary and that the "question of civil unions has been settled for this year."

"If the governor called a special session every time he didn't get something he wanted, we'd be in special sessions all year," Gardner said.

Capitol Democrats said the special session was needed because House Speaker Frank McNulty, R-Highlands Ranch, cut off debate and killed the bill before it reach a vote. Republicans filibustered, and the House didn't have enough time to finish the measure before the Legislature adjourned for the year.

"They killed the bill on a procedural move," said Senate Majority Leader John Morse, D-Colorado Springs. "It's a good idea to get this done. I'm more than happy to do a special session."

Rep. Pete Lee, another Colorado Springs Democrat, said civil unions are "inevitable."

"It's unfortunate that that's the way it's going to be done," said Lee. "We could have finished it during the session in a more timely way."

Morse added that a special session is a good idea because there are many bills the Legislature didn't finish.

OBAMA VOICES SUPPORT FOR GAY MARRIAGE

Analysts say he has more to gain than lose

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON • On the fence no longer, President Barack Obama declared his support for gay marriage Wednesday. The announcement was the first by a sitting president.

Less than a day after North Carolina voters amended their constitution to limit marriage to one man and one woman, Obama said he thinks gay couples should be able to get married.

In an interview with ABC, Obama said "it wouldn't dawn" on his daughters, Sasha and Malia, that some of their friends' parents would be treated differently than others. He said he also thought of aides "who are in incredibly committed monogamous same-sex relationships who are raising kids together."

The president said he was taking a personal position. Aides said the president's shift would have no impact on policies, and he still believes that marriage is an issue best decided by states.

'Evolving view'

Obama said he came to support gay marriage after spending years talking

Barack Obama

to family and friends. Here's a sampling of how his stance has changed since 2009:

• "I believe strongly in stoppinglaws designed to take rights away and passing laws that extend equal rights to gay couples. " — Human Rights Campaign, Oct. 11, 2009

• "At this point, what I've said is, is that my baseline is a strong civil union that provides them the protections and the legal rights that married couples have." — News conference, Dec. 22, 2010

• "Ultimately, they made a decision to recognize civil marriage. And I think that's exactly how things should work." — News conference on New York's passage of gay marriage, June 29, 2011

• "At a certain point I've just concluded that for me personally it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married." — ABC News interview, May 9, 2012

Political analysis

Obama's embrace of gay marriage is a political gamble that seeks to fire up young and liberal voters at the possible expense of alienating undecided voters in swing states such as North Carolina and Florida.

Some advisers, pointing to changing public views of gay rights, say Obama has more to gain than lose by the move. Strong opponents of same-sex marriage were unlikely to support him anyway, they say, and young voters who flocked to his 2008 campaign are hungry for new reasons to get excited about his re-election bid.

But there are potential downsides. Obama's decision on same-sex marriage might inspire conservatives to give more money and campaign time to Republican Mitt Romney. In 2008, Obama narrowly won North Carolina, where voters on Tuesday approved a constitutional ban on gay marriage.

A new AP-GfK poll of adult Americans showed Obama with a 21-percentage-point lead over Romney on the question of who is most trusted to handle "social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage."

Starting last year, small majorities of Americans told the Gallup poll that gay marriage should be legal.

ROMNEY RESPONDS

Mitt Romney reaffirmed that marriage is between a man and a woman. He said he believes that states should decide about whether to offer certain legal rights to same-sex couples. "This is a very tender and sensitive topic, as are many social issues, but I have the same view that I've had since – since running for office," Romney said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OUR VIEW

"GT" 5/12/12

CIVIL UNIONS ONLY EMPOWER RELIGION

State should have no role in relationships

The Gazette's editorial board has great respect for the sanctity of heterosexual relationships and those who believe marriage means one man and one woman. The sacramental marriage is something granted by a religious organization. Any effort to put this responsibility onto the state serves only to undermine religion.

Marriage in a church, a synagogue, a mosque or a temple is a marriage before God that no one can threaten. It is a sacrament in which a couple agrees to live by the tenets of a religion. If government tries to deprive religious leaders and worshippers the ability to define a marriage, war should ensue. In this republic, terms of a sacramental marriage shall forever be defined by individuals and the religious organizations they choose to obey.

We also understand that faith and religion mean nothing if not embraced by individuals who are free to leave them behind. God gave us the liberty to lead lives of orderly discipline or hedonistic depravity. The day religion is something other than a choice is the moment it loses authority and value.

And so, we live in a world in which countless individuals ascribe to no religious faith. Millions of peaceable Americans don't believe in God, much less the morality God prescribed for humanity in sacred scriptures. Christianity, Judaism and Islam — all Western, Abrahamic religions — worship the same God and believe that he has unlimited power.

God, given his limitless power, could have made a world in which all of humanity worshipped him without question. Instead, he gifted humans with the opportunity to choose. In free societies, governments should respect free will to the extent that it does not cause mayhem and death.

In a world of free will, people of the same sex sometimes fall in love. If they are obedient to religion, in most cases their scriptures and instructors tell them they cannot have sex or live as if they are married. For those who are not religious, nothing meaningful tells them they cannot live as married couples. And so, they live as they choose.

Yet, governments tell them they cannot lead lives similar to those of heterosexuals who fall in love. Barbaric governments try to enforce tenets of religion with violence and murder. Religious believers — those who understand that obedience to God is a choice — should be the first to object to any form of government interference in the lives of individuals. Those who believe that homosexual acts are sinful should support the freedom to sin. If we haven't the right to sin, why would anyone need a church, much less the Catholic rite of confession?

The decision to avoid sin — to obey the word of God — must always be a choice, and never a state mandate. Religion by government mandate ushers the demise of religion.

This means the state should have no opinion on the validity of consensual adult relationships. That is the role of religious institutions, and we encourage them to spread the word.

For these reasons, we encourage legislators to approve same-sex civil unions during this week's special session. No individual, who has been given freedom by God, should endure disapproval of government authorities regarding a love relationship. It undermines free will, and weakens religion by allocating its authority to the state. — **Wayne Laugesen, editorial page editor, for the editorial board. Friend Wayne on Facebook; follow him on Twitter.**

GT 5/13/12

Bill should come to the floor

I awoke to a headline I dreaded seeing recently. It was that SB2, the legislation concerning civil union for gays/lesbians, had been killed by a Republican filibuster. I dreaded it because it was the kind of petty political action I have come to expect from Democrats, not my party for yes, I am a Republican, and a former precinct chair.

I am also a white, heterosexual, overeducated, middle class, free market loving, gun owning, married, middle aged quasi-conservative and I consider myself a patriotic tea partier.

The entire point of our representative republic is for our representatives to vote on issues such as this when they do not die in committee. The fact that the Republican leadership in the State Senate fully expected this bill to die in committee (twice) and then it did not (because at least one Republican voted for it — twice) means that the bill should come to the floor, be debated, and voted on. That is the way the system is supposed to work.

The use of these kind of petty tactics belittles the party, belittles our leadership, and, quite honestly, embarrasses us. It felt to me like my leadership basically didn't get their way, threw a tantrum and proverbially "took their toys and went home". Is this what we have become?

The fact is, many of us in the Republican ranks felt this bill was a decent compromise. It gave some common-sense legal protections to gays and lesbians without giving them the "marriage" moniker. It felt like a modest win/win. Instead, I am grinding my teeth, along with numerous conservative Republican friends who see the hand-writing on the wall with this issue: Civil unions are the way to go. Grow up, shape that reality and move forward.

Honestly, I went to my church meeting tonight, and the first thing out of my mouth was an apology to my friend who was devastated by this loss. I told her that I was sorry, and that, for today, I was sad to be a Republican. . . and I am. There is a difference between winning fairly and cheating. This felt like the latter and for all of our lofty Christian ideals and pompous talk of integrity, sometimes the right thing to do is what is the hardest.

In this case, it would have been to acknowledge that the bill deserved to come to the floor, and taking your lumps if you lost. At least then, we could have held up our heads at the end of the day.

Joe Uveges
Colorado Springs

Eliminate divorce instead

I must echo Clifford Horton's May 9 letter to the editor, when he asks how someone's civil union undermines his marriage. I, too, am having a hard time wrapping my mind around that question. So, maybe someone who opposes civil unions can give me an answer of just how someone else's marriage or civil union would adversely affect their marriage?

Shouldn't political and religious conservatives be trying to eliminate divorce? Surely they recognize that divorce does indeed end a marriage, and thereby adversely affects a family. Isn't their goal to preserve the family? Kind of seems logical to eliminate divorce instead, doesn't it?

Bob Armintor
Colorado Springs

OUR VIEW

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LEGISLATURE

CT 5/15/12

CIVIL-UNIONS BILL DIES 2ND DEATH AT SPECIAL SESSION

GOP-led committee dumps measure after hearing 3 hours of testimony

BY JOHN SCHROYER
John.schroyer@gazette.com

DENVER • Colorado lawmakers killed a rejuvenated effort to allow same-sex civil unions during the first day of a special session called to consider that and other bills.

A Republican-controlled State House committee listened to nearly three hours of testimony before dumping the bill, which died on a 5-4 party line vote. It's the second time the GOP has killed the measure in six days, first during a regular session of the General Assembly and Monday during a freshly opened special session.

The arguments Monday were the same as they have been through the entire legislative session.

Backers of the bill testified that the measure would extend civil rights beyond traditional couples. The supporters said denying those rights is tantamount to racial discrimination, and that gay couples can provide just as healthy an environment for children as any straight couple.

"By not passing this bill,

SEE LEGISLATURE • PAGE 5

DETAILS

When the special session opened, the civil-unions bill was sent to the GOP-run House State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, which heard testimony from both sides before sending the bill to a fate that seemed predetermined.

Democrats, who are in the House minority by a single vote, lost the committee hearing by a single vote.

LEGISLATURE: Also weighing water, insurance measures

FROM PAGE 1

what we're saying is, you can go adopt abused kids, but we're not going to give you the same rights that the same parents who abused and neglected them have," said the bill's sponsor, House Minority Leader Mark Ferrandino, D-Denver.

Several opponents testified that the measure is a Democratic campaign tactic that essentially allows gay marriage, which they said is wrong morally and on other fronts.

"The connotation that comes to this country boy is that this is same-sex marriage," said Rep. Don Coram, R-Montrose, who said much of the rights at issue are already protected under the state's designated beneficiary contract.

Designated beneficiary contracts can be taken out by gay couples as a legal step toward various rights that married couples have.

But those contracts are not nearly as comprehensive or as binding as civil unions would be, said Beth Bryant, a spokeswoman for the Colorado Bar Association. Committee Republicans, however, disagreed, and said much of the bill duplicated what was already in law books.

The civil-unions legislation survived for all but a day of the general Assembly's regular session.

The measure sailed through the Senate and passed several House committees with support of GOP rebels before a Republican filibuster killed its chances of getting a floor vote. The session ended with the measure languishing in the House.

Gov. John Hickenlooper made passing a civil union measure a top priority of the special session, which is also considering several other bills.

The hearing Monday packed the largest hearing room in the Capitol — the state's old Supreme Court chamber.

When the special session opened Monday, the bill was sent to the GOP-run House State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, a venue that has been traditionally used by the party controlling the House to scuttle the other side's legislation.

The committee gathered Monday afternoon and heard lengthy testimony from both sides before sending the bill to a fate that seemed predetermined.

Democrats, who are in the House minority by a single vote, lost the committee hearing by a single vote.

After the hearing Democrats quickly held up the demise of civil unions as a campaign issue, a wedge they will jab Republicans with. The GOP has countered that the Democrats raised the civil union issue for political rather than civil rights reasons.

The Republican stance on the bill makes it unlikely to resurface even if it is retrieved from the grave by the Senate.

Meanwhile, lawmakers have plenty left on their plates for the special session.

Lawmakers will mull of water projects aimed at easing drought woes, along with an unemployment insurance measure.

The House State, Veterans and Military Committee was working late Monday night on a controversial measure that would set legal limits for drivers who use marijuana that's tantamount to drunken driving laws. If it gets the thumbs-up from the committee, it may also be heard on the House floor late Monday night.

Lawmakers will likely pass a referendum that would allow voters to repeal state laws now deemed unconstitutional, including a 1992 voter-approved measure that forbids local governments from passing ordinances to protect gay rights. The measure has already been approved by the Senate on an initial vote.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Yes, we can walk the walk and chew gum at the same time

GT 5/19/12

OPINION

DAVID SIROTA

COLUMNIST

One of the most overused metaphors in a writer's arsenal is the one about "walking and chewing gum at the same time." As a hiker and Big League Chew enthusiast, I particularly hate this cliché. Nonetheless, I feel it is fitting right now because it so perfectly summarizes the argument being made by Republicans. They now insist that America cannot simultaneously walk the walk on equal rights and also chew economic gum.

In the last week, Colorado was the testing ground for this talking point. At the presidential level, Republican nominee Mitt Romney criticized a Denver television reporter for daring to ask about his position on, among other issues, same-sex marriage. Before restating his opposition, he scoffed at the question, asking: "Aren't there issues of significance that you'd like to talk about (like) the economy?" At the same time, Colorado's Republican House Speaker Frank McNulty twice blocked a vote on a bill to legalize civil unions. His rationale? "We should not be spending time on divisive social issues when unemployment remains far too high," he said.

Obviously, it's perplexing to see the Republican Party allege that social issues are insignificant and "divisive." This is, after all, the party whose most recent presidential nominating contest was dominated by attacks on contraception — the same GOP whose politicians have made an art out of riding a "guns, god and gays" focused agenda to electoral victory.

But while such naked hypocrisy is enraging, the substance of the Republican rhetoric about gay rights is downright offensive. Essentially, conservatives are asserting that we cannot extend equal rights to all Americans and fix the economy.

Well, you might ask, do they have a point? History says no. Our country's story is the story of multitasking — a tale of extending the franchise to women while passing progressive legislation to deal with crushing economic inequality, a tale of both passing civil rights legislation and creating Medicare.

In light of such achievements, would anyone retroactively argue that America should have opposed the campaign to let women vote because the economy was so bad in the early 20th century? Would anyone insist that lawmakers should have halted civil rights legislation in the 1960s because there was a simultaneous need for a War on Poverty? Probably not, because most of us recognize such arguments for what they are: diversionary nonsequiturs whose real goal is to preserve institutional bigotry and prejudice.

That's the same objective of today's GOP when it comes to rights for same-sex couples. For proof, just consider the abruptness of the shift: the Republican Party that spent the last decade insisting that we should simultaneously cut taxes, prosecute foreign wars and fight to limit a woman's right to choose an abortion now suddenly says we can't even discuss equal rights because of a recession.

The language changed not because the new "can't walk and chew gum" mantra makes sense but because the cause of equal rights is involved. And, clearly, that cause is what today's Republicans are now most committed to stopping — no matter how much their flawed logic indicts their credibility.

David Sirota hosts the morning show on AM760 in Colorado. Email him at ds@davidsirota.com, follow him on Twitter @davidsirota or visit his website at www.davidsirota.com

Voice will be heard at last

GT 5/19/12

I am disappointed in the Republicans who killed the civil unions bill. You may feel victorious but in the end this will destroy your party. Your party clearly chose to stand on myth and superstition instead of the Constitution. Your party clearly chose to be in the pockets of the extremists instead of protecting the citizens from the bullying of zealots. Your party clearly chose to ignore the will of the people by killing a bill that had enough bipartisan support to pass.

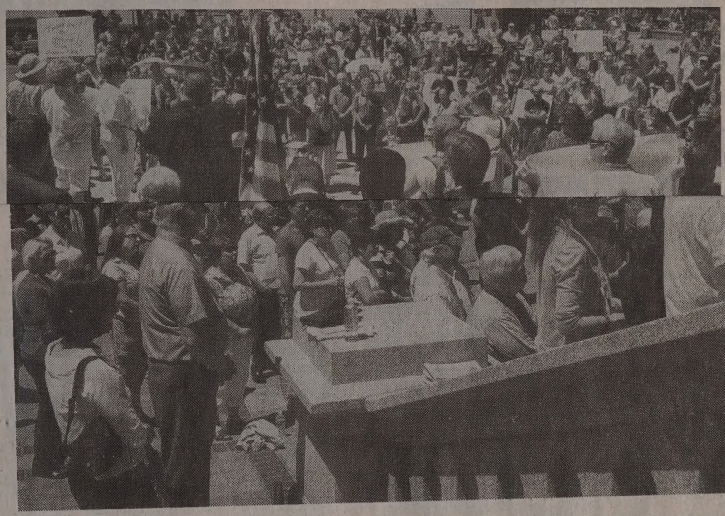
You may not understand this, but no one was asking permission to be gay. We have never needed that. We were not seeking legitimacy of our relationships. We have that in our hearts already. Laws have never swayed anyone from forming a committed loving same sex union, even when it was criminal to do so.

What we — this includes gays and straights alike — were demanding from you is that you fulfill your sworn duty to uphold the Constitution. And you did not. You are of no use to us if you bow to the influential and powerful whose agenda strays from the Constitution. The Constitution is the foundation of this nation and government by the people is not optional. We elect representatives to be our voice. That voice must be heard and not quashed when the fearful deem the message unwanted.

There will be a vote in November. Thought and reason will prevail. Our Constitution will prevail. Our voice will be heard at last.

Carolyn Cathey
Colorado Springs

Thank you to all our state legislators who recently took a strong stand for marriage.



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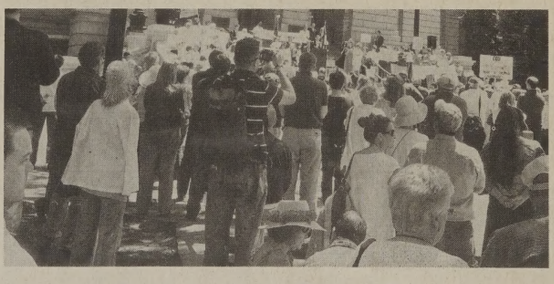
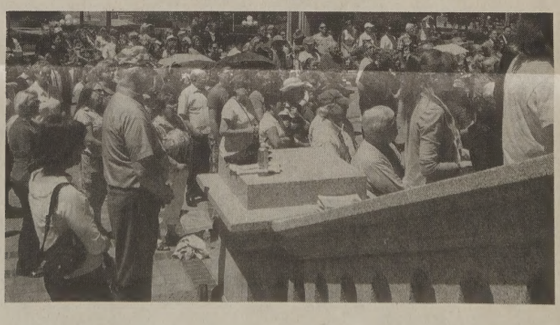
Thank you to all our state legislators who recently took a strong stand for marriage.

Passage of the civil unions bill would have opened the door for a federal lawsuit challenging the state's marriage amendment voters passed in 2006.

Their courageous stand, which prevented such a lawsuit, saved our state millions of taxpayer dollars.



Please join the more than 300 Coloradans who attended a rally at the state Capitol on Tuesday to thank legislators for protecting marriage.



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Clearing up the smokescreen surrounding the civil unions bill

CT 5/29/12

OPINION

AMY STEPHENS

GUEST COLUMNIST

More than 70,000 postcards opposing the Colorado Civil Union Act, SB12-002, were delivered to the Capitol. The sharp opposition and support for this bill was further felt by the thousands of phone calls and emails that poured into my office and that of my colleagues.

Let's be very clear about the timing of this bill; Senate Democrats sat on this bill for 112 days and then lobbed it over to the House knowing that the liberal media would incite a frenzied push to approve it. All this to the detriment of bills addressing jobs, education and infrastructure that is important to the well-being of our state.

To be sure this is a very difficult and emotional subject. We, as a society, are torn and conflicted by how to grapple with these issues personally and it is clearly evidenced in our political process.

As a wife, mother, citizen and legislator, I oppose this bill and any future attempt to undermine one-man, one-woman marriage in this state for several reasons. First, as we've seen in many states, a vote for civil unions is a vote for judicial chaos. Civil unions are a legal stepping stone to usher in same-sex marriage, regardless of established, contradicting state laws. We will likely see what happened in California, take place here in Colorado with our own marriage amendment, which was passed in 2006. Activists in California filed suit against its marriage amendment based on the state's domestic partnership law, a law similar to Colorado's proposed civil union bill. A federal judge then struck down the amendment and declared same-sex marriage to be legal — despite overwhelming voter approval for the marriage amendment.

To date, it has cost more than $10 million to defend California's state marriage amendment in court — money Colorado does not have to spend. So who will be stuck with the bill?

Taxpayers, of course which includes small business, corporations and citizens.

To me, the crux of this issue comes down not to what I stand against, but to what I stand for. The people of Colorado spoke in 2006. If proponents of SB-002 want to take this issue to the ballot — rather than use the Legislature to circumvent the will of the people, then they should do so. However, having watched judicial chaos ensue in other states — to me this is also about the welfare of future generations, right of conscience and religious freedom in society.

Certainly, we want to help all parents in every family structure to succeed. This is why Colorado already has laws giving rights to unmarried couples through Designated Beneficiaries and Second Parent Adoption. The rights and responsibilities in these two laws cover nearly everything in civil union laws. The public was told as much in 2008 by Sen. Steadman who ran the former legislation and now proposes the CU law.

Clearly, the political goal is same-sex marriage.

Governor Hickenlooper's decision to call a special session this week was not for the "extraordinary" reason of jobs and the economy — that could have easily been taken care of the last day of session. This was for the sole purpose of dealing with civil unions. As a swing state, Colorado is being used as a testing ground to re-elect Obama. It was an irresponsible fiscal calculation of our taxpayer dollars, but one that they were very willing to make.

Republican House Speaker Frank McNulty said during press conferences last week, "I suspect it's not coincidence the Governor had President Obama's top Colorado political operatives shuttling in and out of his office.... Gov. Hickenlooper convened the special session for political purposes and is clearly reading from President Obama's campaign playbook as he attempts to distract voters from the real issue: the economy.""

With so much at stake, Coloradans on both sides of this debate deserve more.

Elected to the Colorado House of Representatives as a Republican in 2006, Representative Amy Stephens represents House District 19 and serves as the House majority leader.

Political party games

CT 5/24/12

The past week in the Colorado Legislature has shown us that once again party affiliation and party political games have and can take precedence over sanity and logic, not to mention the will of the majority. Most Americans are not threatened by the prospect of their LGBT neighbors being "allowed" the same rights and privileges that they enjoy. A few misguided people feel that if they are going to have to live their lives with blue eyes and type A blood then everyone should be required to live that way.

The families of LGBT people are no less responsible than others. They do not pay fewer taxes. In fact, if the situation of being deprived of the right to marry is taken into account, they pay more. They also pay more in insurance costs to cover their children and families.

We need to remind our representatives that we are the people and the fact that a majority of Americans supports the right of people to marry the person of their choice should tell them how to vote when these issues come up, rather than being guided by a fearful assumption about who will be mad at them if they vote for rights and against persecution.

My advice to lawmakers who are against gay marriage is "Don't have one." But don't deprive your fellow citizens of their rights because of your fears.

Deborah Greymoon
Colorado Springs

Time to let go of the fear

CT 5/24/12

I have often thought that at the root of all intolerance and discrimination is fear. In the past few weeks, I have personally experienced that this is true. With the debate over civil unions and gay marriage (as if we had no real issues to ponder), I have increasingly found myself thinking about a certain segment of people as if they were something very different and foreign from myself.

I have begun to use the phrase "those people", at least in my mind, to describe them. Though I am sure that I don't know any of 'those people' personally, I mean no one in my family is one of them, I am increasingly aware I have a growing fear of the level of acceptance of their beliefs in our society. These are beliefs which I find unnatural and immoral. At one time they seemed to be a small group on the fringes of society, but now my fear is that if we don't stand up and draw a firm line in the sand, their beliefs will spread like a virus, infecting and corrupting every element of our society as we know it. I certainly wouldn't want them teaching in schools, influencing our children. And what if one of them became president? As my fear grows, so does my intolerance until I wonder, am I becoming one of them?

Of course, the group to which I am referring is the ultraconservative evangelicals.

Think about it, they were once a far-right fringe group. Now they have hijacked the Republican party and redesigned it to cater to their unnatural agenda.

So to fight the urge to become the enemy, I have tried to educate myself so I can understand and have compassion. I learned than 1 in 10 people are ultraconservative. There is no proof yet as to what causes ultraconservativism. Some theorize it may be biological or environmental, but personally I think it's a choice. There are a few treatment centers that claim they can cure them and even make them into liberals.

The bottom line is that we are all just people. What happens to one of us, happens to all of us. Moreover we are facing enormous environmental, economic, political and social challenges that threaten our survival as a species.

Maybe it's time to let go of the fear and the labels and the intolerance and work together to find solutions to our real problems.

Kelly V. Holmes
Colorado Springs

The reality is that marriage is not about sex, but it is about such quaint and arcane ideas as commitment, property and benefits sharing, family (in whatever form of kith and kin people choose to make it), and most importantly, love. Sex is just along for some of those rides.

When social conservatives finally realize that the only true form of social conservatism is living by example for others and not imposing force of government on others, like their reviled liberals do, then just maybe they will finally figure out where they have gone astray.

Until then, Ed, please answer this simple question: To preserve "traditional" marriage, which parts of it do you want brought back that have been discarded onto the ash heap of bad ideas? Miscegenation? (Oh, wait, that's civil rights!) Polygamy? (But Abraham had multiple wives!) Women as chattel? (Whoops, there's that civil rights again!) Arranged marriages for unconsenting minors?

"Traditional" marriage has evolved over millennia, and the same-gender marriage issue is simply another step in that evolution. Such is the dynamic nature of strong human relationships. After all, marriage is about the love, not the plumbing — and so was SB2.

Michael Seebeck
Fountain

CT 6/3/12

Didn't pass the 'sniff test'

Ed Jones in his latest column calls SB2 "a sex bill," and states "the "struggle" for gay marriage is about sex."

Sorry, Ed, but those statements don't even pass the sniff test.

If "gay marriage" is about sex, then so is "straight marriage." (So sayeth I, a straight guy who has been married to my only wife for 15 years.)